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ABSTRACT

A study investigating the morale patterns of a group of 123 student teachers over the course of a 14-week period indicates a discernible pattern for three different groups. High and low morale patterns varied between groups of preservice teachers depending on their projected grade level specification. Early childhood, elementary, and secondary levels of education were considered. Results are presented in graphic and tabular form, and a bibliography is included. (Author/LH)

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AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TEACHER MORALE AMONG THREE GROUPS OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with the morale of student teachers over a fourteen week, student-teaching experience. The two questions researched were: (1) Does student teacher morale describe a discernible pattern over time, and (2) is this pattern different for groups of early childhood, elementary, and secondary student teachers. Identification of a pattern indicating periods of high and low morale among student teachers can provide valuable information to those responsible for student teaching programs. All the student teachers (N = 123) enrolled for fourteen weeks of student teaching during the Spring 1979, semester at the University of Alabama were asked to recall and record their morale during each week of the semester. The data were collected during the final student teaching seminar. The data were analyzed graphically by plotting the means of three groups, (1) early childhood, (2) elementary, and (3) secondary for each of the fourteen weeks of the semester. A discriminant analysis, using the scores for the fourteen weeks to discriminate among the groups was performed to determing whether or not group profiles were different. Results indicated a discernible pattern for each of the three groups and a distinction between the patterns.

AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TEACHER MORALE

AMONG THREE GROUPS OF STUDENT TEACHERS

The morale of the student teacher should be an important aspect of the student teaching experience. High morale is a necessary contributor to the success of the student teacher and low morale can lead to an unsuccessful experience. In addition, most educators would agree that high morale on the part of a teacher leads to a corresponding high morale in their students.

University supervisors and supervising teachers in the schools are aware of changes in morale that occur during the student teaching experience. When incidents of low morale occur, these supervisory personnel seek ways to improve the morale of their student teachers. The ability of supervisory personnel to identify changes in morale level has been documented through several research efforts (Anderson, 1953; Bentley & Price, 1970; and Blumberg & Weber, 1968). Little has been done, however about identifying critical periods in the student teaching experience that might lead to low morale for the student teacher. If such periods could be identified, supervisory personnel would possess information that might enable them to foresee problems before they occur.

Studies of self-concept exemplified by Dumas (1969), Garvey (1970), and Milgram & Milgram (1976) are quite common in the literature. Investigations of attitude change for student teachers are usually correlational, such as the studies by Noad (1979) and Weinstock & Peccolo (1970), or use a pre- to post-test assessment methodology (Morris & Chissom, 1978) which does not indicate when

an attitude might have changed during the student teaching experience. A recent study by Golden and Murray (1979) investigated sources of anxiety as perceived by student teachers using a pre- to post-test assessment. Again, no information was available to identify when an increase in anxiety level occurred.

Self-concept, attitudes, and anxiety are related to student teacher morale, but specific studies and data concerning student teacher morale are limited. Price (1971) developed an instrument to measure student teacher morale, and Brogdon et al (1979) conducted a recent study dealing with the morale of student teachers. An extensive literature review revealed little else.

The present study was an attempt to replicate a research project by Morris & Chissom (1979) which was conducted at Texas A & M University, and was concerned with assessing student teacher morale during the semester of the student teaching experience. Assessment was longitudinal in nature and was designed to collect data during the entire semester, thus avoiding the problems of limited information arising from a pre- to post-test design.

PROBLEM

This investigation sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does student teacher morale describe a discernable pattern over time?

2. Is this pattern different among three groups of student teachers who are emphasizing early childhood, elementary, and secondary education in their programs of study?

Morale is an illusive and abstract construct and was defined, for the purposes of this study as: The student teacher's mental

and emotional condition with regard to performance of the various tasks required during student teaching.

High Morale was characterized by enthusiasm, confidence, a sense of accomplishment, self-satisfaction with progress toward objectives, positive attitude toward self, students, and supervisors, and a feeling of "I really like (enjoy) what I'm doing!"

Low Morale was characterized by a lack or absense of these feelings or attitudes as various student teaching tasks are performed.

METHOD

Subjects. One hundred twenty three student teachers participated in the study and constituted the total number of on-campus early childhood, elementary, and secondary student teachers for the Spring Semester, 1979 at the University of Alabama. Of this total there were 44 early childhood majors, 34 elementary majors, and 45 secondary majors. The secondary group was more heterogeneous, encompassing most of the subject matter areas and composed of approximately equal numbers of males and females. Music education student teachers made up approximately one-third (n = 14) of the secondary group. The early childhood and elementary groups were predominantly female and more homogeneous in nature. The early childhood majors were in a kindergarten through grade three teacher certification program. Elementary majors were seeking certification in grades one through six. Secondary majors were working toward grade seven through twelve certification.

Data Collection. The instrument chosen for collecting data was selected because of its use in previous research on teacher morale

(Morris and Chisson, 1979) and the desire to partially replicate the previously cited study. Figure 1 is a copy of the instrument for the student teacher's responses and is a matrix of scale score by weeks of student teaching. An explanation of "morale", similar to the definition offered earlier in this paper, is presented at the top of the instrument. The student teachers were given the matrix and instructed to close their eyes, let their minds go back to the first week in student teaching, and then record their morale at that point in time. The process was repeated for each

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Insert Figure I about here

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of the remaining 13 weeks of the semester with cues provided to aid the recall of events that had taken place and increase the accuracy of the response.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed for each of the three groups of student teachers over the fourteen weeks of the semester. Table 1

Insert Table 1 about here

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contains the means and standard deviations for these categories and the total group. Group profiles for each of the three categories of student teachers were constructed from the data in Table 1 and are shown in figures 2, 3, and 4.

Insert Figures 2, 3, and 4 about here

Research question 1 was whether or not there is a discernable fluctuation in the pattern of student teacher morale over the fourteen weeks of the student teaching experience. Upon examination of the three profiles it seemed clear that a pattern was identifiable and was not a constant (flat) profile across time. There were high points in the profiles as well as low points, and some distinct variation was discernable among the three groups.

The second research question asked by the researchers was whether or not the pattern or profile of responses over the 14 weeks was different for the three groups. In addition to the visual comparison, the data were analyzed using a multiple discriminant analysis with the responses of the student teachers at each of the 14 week recordings serving as the dependent variables. Results indicated a difference significant at less than the .15 level of confidence ($x^2 = 35.76$; $H = 28$). This finding, used more as descriptive results rather than as an hypothesis test, provides some support for differences existing among the group profiles. However, these descriptive results should be considered more of a trend in the data, or an indication of difference, rather than as a significant result. The only discernable difference in the profiles, that could be detected by inspection of the data, was between the elementary majors and the other two groups. The visual comparison was supported by the information obtained from the discriminant analysis, even though the results were descriptive in nature.

Further inspection for the profiles (Figures 2, 3, and 4) indicated that the general level of morale was high, and usually

above four on the five-point scale. Responses were made over the entire range of score values (1 to 5) for each of the 14 weeks, with the majority of the responses above three. At the beginning of the student teaching experience, the elementary groups' morale was at a higher level than the morale of the other two groups. This beginning high level for the elementary group was followed by a definite decrease in morale during week seven. The other two groups had slight increases during that time and did not register the lower morale at mid-semester. These results are similar to those obtained from the previously cited study at Texas A & M University (Morris and Chissom, 1979) using the same data collection procedures. An additional result of the profile comparison was the increase in morale at the end of the semester. Again, this is a finding similar to results from the previously cited study. This upturn in morale is a perplexing one to explain in that it was possibly a report of positive feelings that come at the end of an extended experience such as student teaching. It does not seem to support the contentions of those critics of student teaching experiences that say student teaching results in negative feelings and reduced morale. Although, negative feelings did occur for some individual cases, it was not the pattern for the three student teacher groups.

SUMMARY

This investigation was attempted to provide additional information in the assessment of student teacher morale. The data collection and analysis were patterned after a previous study and the results reported here confirmed many of the previous results. A

pattern of morale for student teachers can be established over the student teaching experience, and differences in the patterns (profiles) of diverse groups of student teachers are detectable. However, the methodology employed in this study can only be considered exploratory and should be employed in additional research efforts to establish its usefulness.

Further research should look into the possibility of rating morale on something other than the five-point global scale employed in this study. Although the global rating seems to be sensitive to changes in the morale of student teachers, other methods should be tried. A more sensitive assessment procedure should provide more interpretable results.

The results of this study can be used by those responsible for the student teaching experience to plan interventions designed to make the experience a more positive one. Lowered morale, as exemplified by the elementary majors during week 7 (Figure 3), is an opportunity for such an intervention by supervisory personnel. The pattern of morale may be a general one similar to the one reported here or it may be specific to the institution responsible for student teaching. Only a wide variety of research efforts similar to the one reported here will determine whether or not there is a general pattern. Further, interventions designed to alter the pattern in a more positive way for the student teacher (increase morale) should be conducted and documented.. Finally, if nothing else, the methodology described here can provide, to those responsible for student teaching, an additional source of information for use in making the student teaching experience a rewarding one.

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Figure 1 - Student Teacher Morale Scale

Morale, in this exercise, refers to your mental and emotional condition with regard to performance of the various tasks required of you during student teaching. High morale is characterized by enthusiasm; confidence; a sense of accomplishment; self-satisfaction with progress toward objectives; positive attitudes toward self, students, and supervisor; and a feeling of "I really like (enjoy) what I am doing!" Low Morale is characterized by a lack or absence of these feelings or attitudes as you perform the various tasks and roles in student teaching.

Below is a chart representing 14 weeks for this semester. For each week there is a "Morale Scale" of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Please circle the number which best represents your morale for that week.

WEEK NUMBER

Morale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Morale
High	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	High
	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	
	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Low	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Low

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of All Groups and Total for 14 Weeks of Student Teaching on the Student Teacher Morale Scale

Week	GROUP							
	Early Childhood		Elementary		Secondary		Total	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1	4.14	.95	4.38	.85	3.87	.79	4.11	.89
2	4.27	.85	4.38	.65	3.91	.76	4.17	.79
3	4.25	.78	4.29	.84	4.00	.74	4.17	.79
4	4.04	.91	4.18	.76	3.96	.97	4.05	.89
5	3.98	1.09	4.18	.76	4.04	.82	4.06	.90
6	4.16	1.06	4.06	.69	4.02	.83	4.08	.88
7	4.39	1.08	3.74	1.05	4.09	.86	4.10	1.02
8	3.93	1.13	4.00	1.15	4.43	.80	4.14	1.04
9	3.98	1.05	3.88	1.12	4.04	1.18	3.98	1.11
10	4.11	1.06	4.09	1.00	4.12	1.03	4.11	1.03
11	4.13	1.09	4.35	.88	4.21	1.04	4.22	1.01
12	4.16	.89	4.32	.98	4.09	1.13	4.18	1.01
13	4.41	.95	4.32	1.01	4.19	1.12	4.30	1.03
14	4.48	.88	4.44	.82	4.51	.86	4.48	.85

FIGURE 2 - STUDENT TEACHER MORALE PROFILE FOR Early Childhood Majors (N = 44)

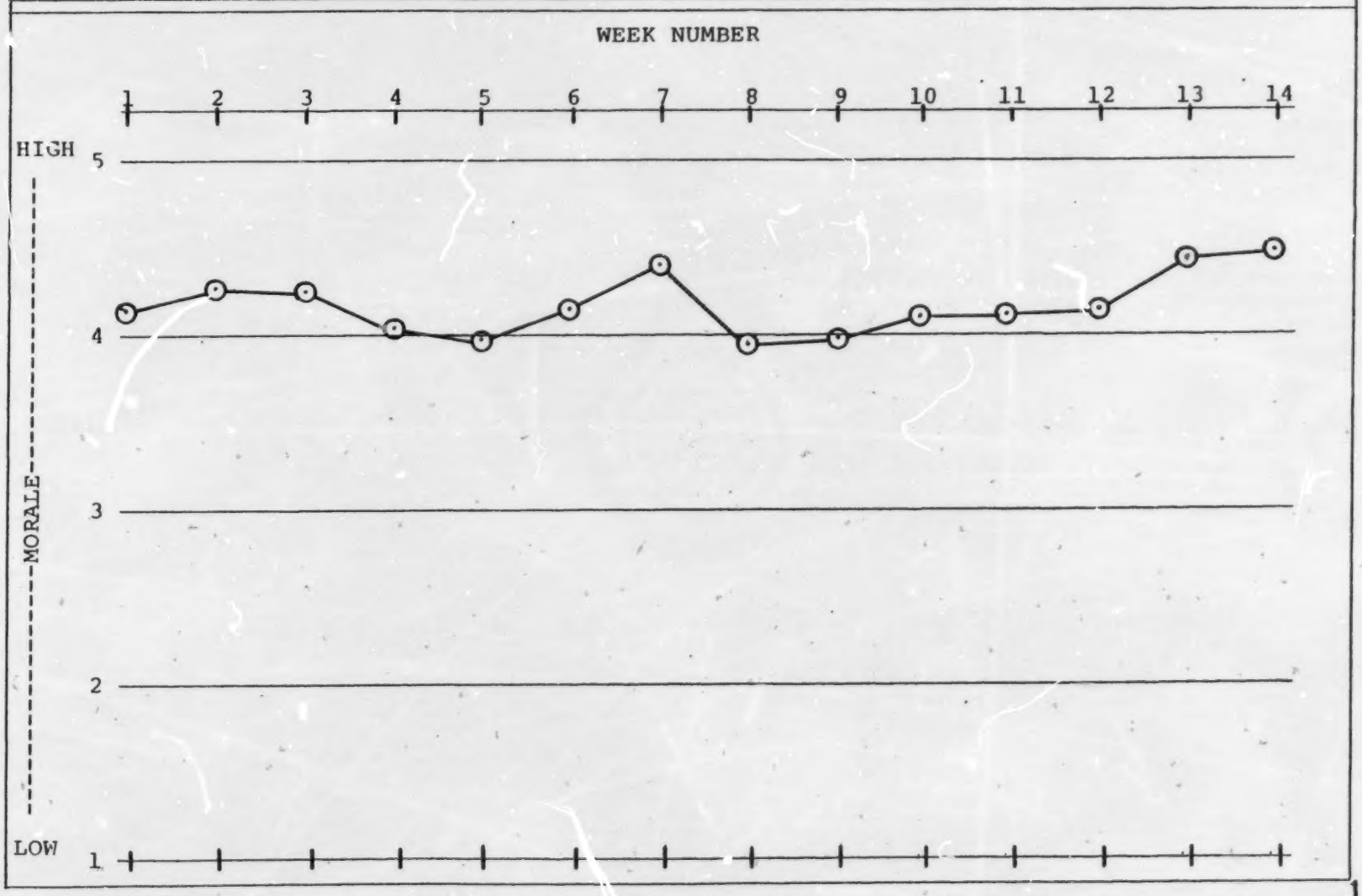

FIGURE 3 - STUDENT TEACHER MORALE PROFILE FOR Elementary Majors (N = 34)

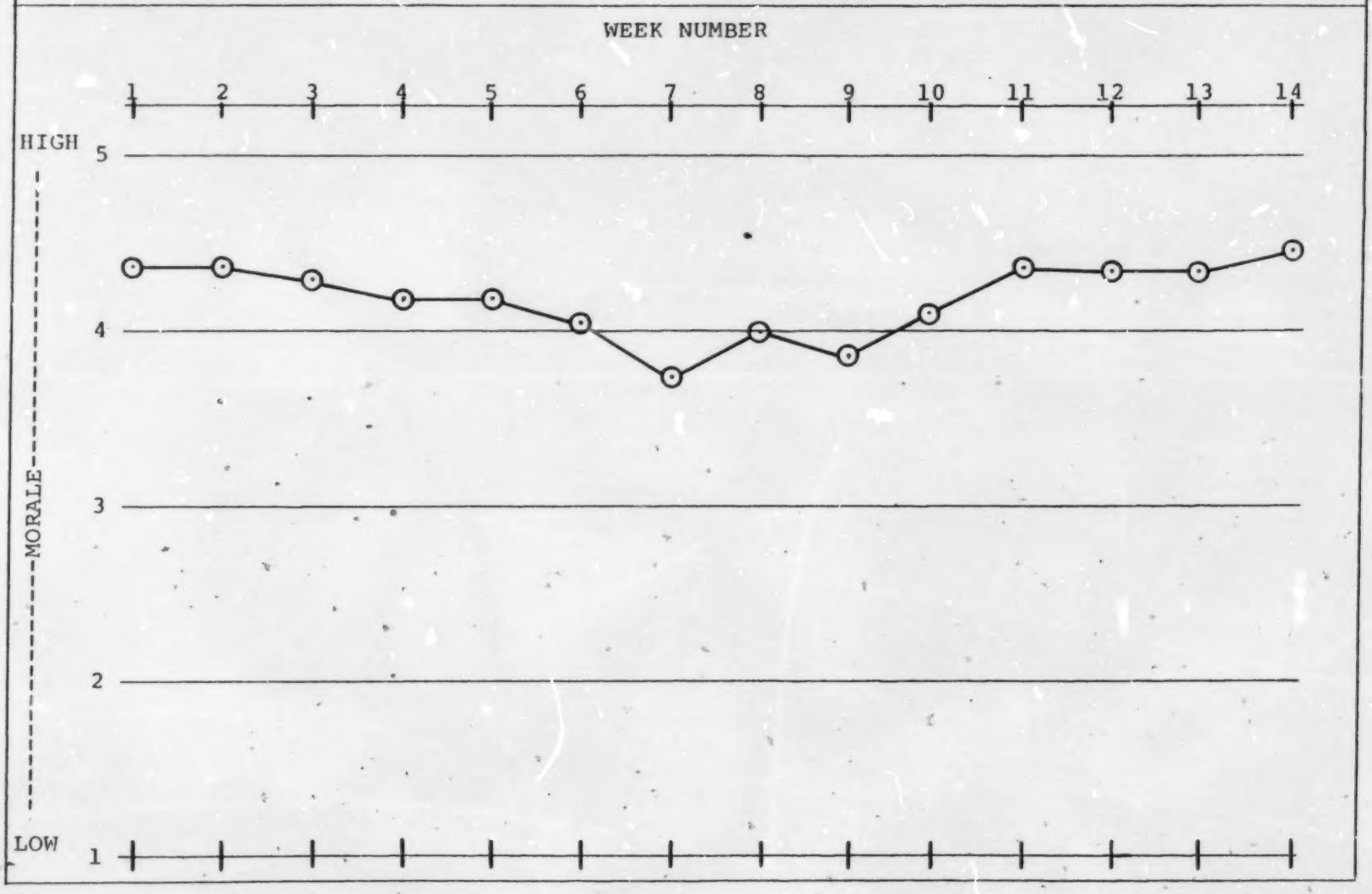

FIGURE 4 - STUDENT TEACHER MORALE PROFILE FOR Secondary Majors (N = 45)